



Mott Poll Report

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Split-Second Decisions: First Aid at Home or Rush to the ER?

Young children often experience urgent medical situations that require parents to make immediate decisions about providing first aid at home or seeking emergency care. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children age 0-5 years about their decision-making around common medical situations that occur at home.

Parents were presented with scenarios involving urgent medical situations and asked to rate their confidence that they would know what to do and describe their immediate response if the situation occurred with their child. For the hypothetical situation in which their young child got a small burn on the arm from a hot pan, most parents (71%) were very confident they would know what to do. The most common response (83%) was to put something on the burn, such as cold water, ice, or first aid cream. Five percent of parents would call 9-1-1 for a small burn, while 11% would take their child directly to the ER.

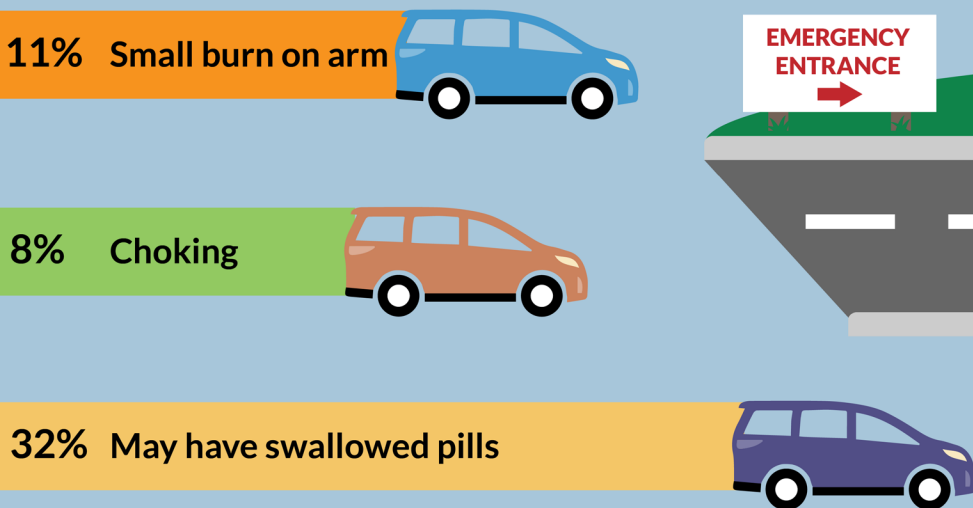
Only 48% of parents were very confident they would know what to do if their child was choking. Most parents indicated that their immediate response would be to try to dislodge the object through a combination of tactics, such as the Heimlich maneuver (69%), trying to remove the object with their finger (54%), hitting the child on the back (48%), or turning the child upside down (25%). Twenty-nine percent would call 9-1-1 if their child was choking, while 8% would take the child directly to the ER.

Half of parents were very confident they would know what to do in a situation where their child got into someone's purse and possibly swallowed medication. Immediate responses included trying to remove any pills from the child's mouth (53%) or making the child throw up (26%). Many parents would call Poison Control (61%), their child's doctor (25%) and/or 9-1-1 (26%) to get advice, while 32% would immediately take the child to the ER.

Ten percent of parents said they had received first aid training within the past year, 24% had training 1-5 years ago, and 23% had training more than 5 years ago; 43% of parents have never had any first aid or medical training. Parents with no first aid training had the least confidence, while parents with first aid training in the past year had the most confidence, in knowing what to do for urgent child health situations.

Choosing the ER for urgent medical situations

Percent of parents who would take children 0-5 to the ER



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2017

Report Highlights

Among parents of children age 0-5:

Only half of parents were confident that they would know what to do if their child were choking.

1 in 10 parents would take their young child immediately to the ER for a minor burn.

Parents with recent first aid training were more confident they would know what to do to handle their child's urgent medical situations.

Data Source & Methods

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by GfK Custom Research, LLC (GfK), for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in May 2017 to a randomly selected, stratified group of parents age 18 and older (n=2,051). Adults were selected from GfK's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 61% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 386 parents who had at least one child age 0-5 years. The margin of error is ±2 to 7 percentage points.

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.

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Implications

During early childhood, children become progressively more mobile and curious about their surroundings, but are not yet able to understand and follow rules consistently. Sometimes, even with careful monitoring, children experience urgent medical situations, forcing parents to make immediate decisions about administering first aid at home, calling for advice, and/or seeking emergency care.

Results from this Mott Poll suggest that some parents of young children may be using the ER for common situations that could be handled at home. While going to the ER may reassure parents that their child is unharmed, there are downsides. For example, the time spent traveling to the ER may interfere with quick action. For example, a child who is choking would likely see a greater benefit from their parent dislodging the object as quickly as possible, rather than delaying immediate action to drive to the ER. Also, the ER is a costly location for care; a large bill for emergency care is justified for true emergencies, but perhaps not for minor injuries.

Many parents in this Mott Poll indicated that their strategy to handle urgent medical situations would involve calling for advice. This is a sound strategy that allows parents to avoid an unnecessary ER visit, but still obtain guidance from a health care professional. The child's usual health care provider is a common source of telephone advice; however, not all clinics have trained health professionals answering calls. It is important for parents to understand clinic policies related to telephone advice, so they don't waste time in an urgent situation waiting for a provider to return their call.

In the case of a child who may have swallowed medication, 6 in 10 Mott Poll respondents would call Poison Control for advice. This is an excellent strategy, as the Poison Control staff can elicit information about the type of medication and direct parents on the appropriate next steps. In the heat of the moment, parents who take their child directly to the ER may forget to bring the source of possible poisoning, leaving ER providers with limited information to determine the child's treatment.

These Mott Poll results demonstrate that first aid knowledge and training helps parents feel more confident in their ability to handle common medical situations. In certain situations, such as a small burn, parents would likely be able to consult a first aid book or online reference to guide their response. In contrast, more time-sensitive situations such as choking require that parents be knowledgeable and ready to act. First aid training can help parents manage urgent medical situation effectively.

Unfortunately, 4 in 10 parents of young children have received no first aid training, and thus may be unprepared to handle common medical situations that may arise. Birth preparation classes often contain a first aid component, but parents may want to participate in refresher courses to make sure their knowledge is up-to-date. First-aid training through community organizations and health care facilities, as well as online modules, are useful steps to boost parents' knowledge and confidence.